McLEAN COUNTY BLACKS

IN

THE CIVIL WAR

BY

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AUGUST 2, 1993

MCLEAN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
A65900 110565

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent of involvement of blacks from McLean county, Illinois in the Civil War. Previous research has indicated there were about twenty black males from McLean county who enlisted in "colored regiments"[1] This paper will show the number of black males in McLean county who enlisted during the war is probably closer to thirty-nine and the number who died in battle or of disease totaled thirteen. After the war, at least twenty-nine black veterans who had served in a variety of regiments, moved into the county. In all, there were at least 68 black veterans of the Civil War who at one time or another, resided in McLean county.[2]

Between 1850 and 1870 there were many, many blacks moving into and out of the county. This mobility has previously proven an obstacle to identifying black veterans. Hopefully, this paper will be the foundation for future research on this topic. In no way should this research be construed as the "final say".

An example of the difficulty in identifying black war veterans during a period of high mobility such as the Civil War era, is the case of George S. Williams. Williams had been a slave in Mississippi and was present when a skirmish took place involving the 33rd illinois Infantry, known as the

"teacher's" regiment from Illinois State Normal University. Williams ran away and attached himself to the 33rd Illinois in 1862 and favorably impressed his liberators. In the fall of 1862, members of the 33rd Illinois helped Williams travel to Bloomington, Illinois where he resided for a year. On November 23, 1863 he enlisted in Co. A, 29th United States Colored Infantry in Quincy, Illinois and was appointed a Corporal. He then returned to Bloomington as a recruiter. Williams was wounded in the battle of the Petersburg Crater and died on August 8, 1864, possibly as a prisoner of war.[3] Williams' name does not appear on any census rolls for McLean county. Had it not been for a brief article found in an 1864 edition of The Daily Pantagraph that anything at all is known about George S. Williams, former slave, army recruiter, Bloomington resident, and honored dead of the Union army.

A CALL TO ARMS

Early in the war there were rumors of black regiments being raised by both the north and south. The Lincoln administration, as well as the Republican newspapers, denied these rumors. The war was being fought to preserve the Union, under the existing constitution, and it was not an "abolitionist war."[4]

As much as the Lincoln administration attempted to skirt the slave issue, it would not go away. When Union forces moved through the South, they were besieged by scores of slaves

seeking both protection and freedom. Eventually, the Union army had to develop a policy to deal with these slaves.

The southern armies had from the beginning of the war, used blacks, both slave and free, as cooks, servants, and laborers.[5] In the north this was used as an argument for a similar use of blacks in the Union armies. Individual Union generals, most notably General Ben Butler, adopted the policy of utilizing fugitive slaves as teamsters, cooks, officer's servants, and laborers.[6]

The step from laborer to armed soldier among the fugitive slaves attached to the Union armies was opposed by the Lincoln administration. However, there were Union commanders who held a liberal interpretation of the Confiscation Act and began to arm the former slaves. Among them was General David Hunter who issued an emancipation proclamation applicable to his Department of the South which encompassed parts of South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida in 1861. Not only did he free slaves, but he began to organize them into armed regiments. Lincoln was not yet ready to arm blacks and Hunter's efforts were scuttled.

Meanwhile, in Louisiana, General Ben Butler was attempting the very same thing. He organized fugitive slaves into Native Guards that were a branch of the Louisiana state militia. The only difference between Butler's efforts and those of Hunter, was the Lincoln administration was not aware of the Louisiana Native Guards until September, 1862.[7] To have disbanded the

Native Guards, the Lincoln administration risked a slave insurrection directed against the Union forces in Louisiana, a serious threat to the Union's tenacious hold on the vital port of New Orleans. The Native Guards were allowed to continue as an armed force under the Union army in Louisiana.

In the western frontier state of Kansas, abolitionists were actively encouraging blacks to enroll in the Union army during the fall of 1861. By August, 1862 a regiment of blacks was being organized in Kansas, despite Lincoln's opposition.[8] The Kansan abolitionists continued their efforts and as word spread, blacks free and fugitive, flocked to the state. In September, 1862 the companies of the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers began to fill up and by October were being actively engaged against Rebel forces in Missouri.

In all there were five regiments of black troops organized in 1862. Neither the three regiments of Butler's Louisiana Native Guards nor the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers had received authorization from the War Department.[9] Only did the 1st South Carolina Colored Volunteers receive such authorization.

The Lincoln administration was aware of these unauthorized regiments and the fact no reprimands were ever issued is indicative of Lincoln's hesitant approval of arming black troops. It was not until his Emancipation Proclamation did Lincoln take the official position of raising black regiments.

Governor John Andrews of Massachusetts was an ardent

abolitionist and lept at the opportunity of raising a black regiment. He issued an order on January 28, 1863 to raise a number of volunteer companies, some of which were to include those of African descent. In short order, the Massachusetts 54th Colored Infantry was being organized at Readville, Massachusetts.

The response to Governor Andrews call to fill the 54th was so great, a second regiment, the Massachusetts 55th was created to accommodate the influx of enlisted men. It was into this regiment, the Massachusetts 55th, that 13 of Bloomington's black residents enlisted, eight of them being assigned to Co. E.[10]

The Massachusetts 55th was mustered into service at Readville on June 22, 1863. They were transferred to Folly Island, S.C. on July 21, 1863. From Folly Island the 55th were deployed on operations against Fort Sumpter, Charleston, James Island, and Honey Hill (Grahamville Station), Georgia, as well as numerous expeditions in South Carolina and Georgia. The regiment was discharged at Boston, Massachusetts on September 23, 1865. In total, the regiment lost 197 men killed, wounded, or to disease.[11]

In Illinois, Governor Yates had been resolving himself to the issue of raising black regiments. Finally, Yates authorized John A. Bross to raise a regiment of black troops. Bross placed a letter in the Daily Pantagraph on November 13, 1863 calling for all "able bodied colored men" to enlist, and

enlist they did. Over the next several months. a total of 26 blacks from McLean county answered Bross' letter. They were mustered into the 29th United States Colored Infantry, most being assigned to Co. A.[12]

The 29th USCI regiment was organized at Quincy, Illinois on April 24, 1864 under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel John A. Bross of Chicago. The regiment was ordered to Annapolis, Maryland and left Quincy for Chicago from where they traveled by train to Pittsburg and then to Baltimore. The 29th arrived in Washington, DC on April 30, 1864, being stationed at White House Landing.[13] From there, the regiment was deployed into several operations including the sieges of Petersburg and Richmond, the Petersburg mine explosion, Weldon railroad, Boydton plank road, Hatcher's run, and Appomatox. After the war, the regiment was transferred to Brownsville, Texas where they were mustered out on November 6, 1865. In total, the 29th lost 234 men killed, wounded, and to disease.[14]

THE MASSACHUSETTS 55th AND THE BATTLE OF HONEY HILL

The 55th arrived at Folly Island, SC on July 30, 1863 under the command of Colonel Norwood Hallowell. They were then engaged in fatigue duty at Folly Island, Forts Wagner and Gregg, and Morris Island, SC. The work was hard in the oppressive heat of summer as both mosquitos and minies filled the air while the 55th carried out their duties.

Throughout the fall of 1863, the 55th was engaged in nearly constant fatigue duty and on several occasions, while being shelled by Rebel cannon. Fatigue duty for the 55th, as well as for many black regiments, was a controversial assignment. In almost every instance, black regiments were assigned a grossly disproportionate amount of fatigue duty than were white regiments. Col. Hollowell protested several times to his commanding officers of the unequal work load his 55th had to endure.

Morale in the 55th suffered from the heavy work load and from the difference in pay black regiments received as compared to white regiments. Promises had been made by Governor Andrews that both the 54th and 55th would receive pay of thirteen dollars a month, the same as the white regiments, but on their first pay day, the black soldiers only received ten dollars a month.[15] The pay was refused and thus began a controversy that was to be argued in the halls of Washington over whether or not black troops should receive equal pay to the white troops. It would be nearly eighteen months before the pay issue was resolved in favor of equality.

These issues of inequality in both pay and work loads are addressed in a letter written by Pvt. John Abbot, a 22 year old groomsman from Bloomington who served as brigade wagon master in Co. F, Massachusetts 55th, and who later died at Charleston, SC in 1866:

Folly Island, SC
November 10, 1863

Most worthy and esteemed friends:--You will please excuse this humble effort to let you know something about what we are doing away down here in Dixie.

In the first place we are all well and doing well, but the main thing is yet pending and that is what we came here for. So far as we have had opportunity, we have been true to the man; and those in command of us say that they don't want better soldiers.

We have done all the work that was to do here in regard to taking Charleston, including the taking of Fort Wagner and Fort Gregg. The gallant 55th has the praise of being the best regiment that has ever been in this department, and yet they don't feel disposed to give us what is the most essential to us as a people and a race--and that is equality with the white man.

In the capacity that I am in, I have time and opportunity to see and compare things together; and I can see more distinctions shown than any one else would imagine, having the honor of being brigade wagon master. A great portion of this mean partiality comes under my particular notice; but if I continue in this strain you will all think that I am dissatisfied; and I would not like to have you think that, because I am very well satisfied, with the exception of what I have told you.

All the boys from Bloomington join me in love to you all, especially Martin Thompson. He says that he would very much like to be there, but if he can be instrumental in accomplishing that which he enlisted for, he is very contented, and expects to conduct himself so as to be a credit to his regiment, his race, and his native place, (even if we do not get what we expect). We all think that the administration intended to fool us before we left, consequently we will go back to work again if we are allowed, and win a name and likewise fame, in another department.

Our motto is, that every man is born free and equal, and that equality we are fighting for, and we expect to fight, with the help of the Almighty, until we get it. We have worked night and day for months to try and accomplish this great end, and they give us credit for all we have done, and why won't they give us this that we most desire? I am afraid that they think that

if we excel them as soldiers, that we might possibly excel them in other things; therefore we might contend in other things. In the first place, we left our homes and friends with the expectation that we were going to do something for the elevation of our race, and therefore we kept ourselves in good cheer, hoping that we might have an opportunity to free some of the bondmen; and if that which we came for be denied us, we can't well tell what we are fighting for; but if they fulfill their contract, we will fight on and take Charleston like men; and if we are men in this capacity, why not let us be men in any other? Because I am told that this is the most noble way a man can show his manhood. I am even now under the immediate sound of cannon which are hurling death and destruction at the enemy, and it makes my heart leap with joy when I think I helped plant those same cannon, and stand ready to sustain them if they should be overpowered by the enemy.

I feel safe to say that there is not one man that is not eager for the fray; because we feel that we are right, and must win. Every man feels confidant of victory, and don't hesitate one moment to take his place in the ranks of the gallant 55th.

There is another thing I must call your attention to, and that is the very miraculous good fortune of this regiment. We have worked together with other regiments, and the enemy's shells have bursted right in our midst and have killed men standing beside our men, but never hurt any of us. I have seen shells burst where we were working, and it seemed through the will of God that it always picked out men that did not belong to our regiment. Therefore I think that we are blessed with the favor of the Almighty, and are still among his favored few that are fighting for a good and holy cause; and if He favors us, why should not those few men that try and do every thing they can to keep us from having what credit is due us? But I think the day will come and that not far distant, when we will be equalized; and in the mean time, we want you to pray earnestly for us because sometimes we don't have time to even pray.

We hope you will all write to us, at least as many as can, so that we may have something to revive us when we think of home.

Yours truly,

John Abbot[16]

Throughout the spring and summer of 1864, John Abbot and his comrades began to see more action as Sherman's campaign in the south began to escalate. Sherman had begun his georgia campaign from Chattanooga, with Atlanta his goal. Onward his forces pressed from Rocky Face Ridge, to Kennesaw Mountain, and to Atlanta in July where the Union army laid siege until the city fell in September. During this period, the 55th had been engaged in several skirmishes and expeditions, all with the intent of disrupting the Rebel forces.

In November, Sherman set out from Atlanta for Savannah and as his column neared the city, Rebel troops were positioned at Grahamville Station north of Savannah, to protect the last rail link between the city and the Confederacy, the other lines having been destroyed by Sherman's army. It was at Grahamville Station, also known as Honey Hill, the Massachusetts 55th were to attempt to sever the last rail line out of Savannah.

On the evening of November 29, 1864 the Massachusetts 54th and 55th, the 56th and 127th New York, the 25th Ohio, the 35th USCI, and the 3rd Rhode Island Artillery were deployed just east of Grahamville Station.[17] The terrain was heavily wooded, dotted with swampy creeks and open fields of tall grasses. On November 30, the advance on Grahamville Station at Honey Hill began. The assault columns were formed and advanced on the Rebel works. Heavy artillery did deadly

work on the advancing columns as the Rebels set fire to the grass in the open fields. This, combined with the scorching sun and heavy losses, brought the assault to a halt.

As the assault columns fell back, the 54th and 55th became separated from the main Union force but they regrouped and formed again with the main column. As the next advance began, the 54th and 55th were to deploy to the right where the Grahamville road branched to the north. The road was crowded with artillery wagons and the two regiments had problems arriving to the right of the road to perform a left flanking maneuver. As the Rebel guns blazed at the forming column, the assault column to the left of the road advanced at the Rebel works but were repulsed. Orders were given for both left and right columns to form a double column for a direct assault of all columns on the Rebel center. Companies K,I, and E of the 55th did not receive these orders and advanced as previously planned, ending up in heavy woods and eventually at a stream with the 25th Ohio and were pinned down by heavy fire.

In the meantime, the main column had approached the center of the Rebel works through a narrow gap in woods. They were then subjected to a heavy concentration of fire and pulled back after suffering heavy losses. In the first five minutes of this assault, the 55th incurred over 100 casualties. After falling back, the assault force lay on their arms till dark, then silently retreated.[18]

Union losses were heavy. In all, there were 755 casualties, including 88 killed, 623 wounded and 44 missing. The rebels lost only 8 killed and 42 wounded.[19] The Union wounded and dead included blacks from McLean county in the 55th. Martin Thompson of Co. E, a 21 year old bricklayer originally from Columbus, Ohio was shot in the left hand. Sylvester Merriman, also a private in Co. E, was a farmer originally from Waterloo, Illinois and played in the 55th's band, was shot in the right.

There were two deaths of Bloomington men in the 55th, both in Co. E. Pvt. Samuel Glasco, a 20 year old born in Tennessee was killed during one of the assaults. Also killed was Joseph Scott, a 26 year old laborer originally from St. Louis who died of disease at Honey Hill on December 8,1864 and may have been taken prisoner during the battle.

This was the largest battle the 55th was engaged in during the war.

THE 29th USCI AND THE BATTLE OF THE PETERSBURG CRATER

The 29th was mustered into service on April 24, 1864. The regiment was immediately assigned to the 4th Division, IX Corps. The 4th Division was the first black division to serve with the Union army in Virginia.

On May 6, the 29th joined the Union army in Virginia and their first assignment was protecting the supply train during Grant's assault on Lee at Spotsylvania. They successfully

repelled an attack on the supply trains on the evening of May 6.

As Grant moved from the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, and to Petersburg, the 29th was often forced to undergo long marches to maintain protection of the supply trains. During these forced marches, the 29th was engaged twice by Lee's forces, once at Bank's Ford, and again at Salem Church near Fredericksburg. Upon reaching Petersburg, the 29th occupied the second line of trenches to the left of Petersburg.[21]

The first-sergeant of Co. A was William McCaslin, a 32 year old barber from Bloomington. During the course of the war, he wrote several letters detailing the activities of the 29th. His first letter was written soon after the regiment had been deployed in the siegeworks before Petersburg. In this letter he describes the regiment's trip to Virginia from Bloomington and then gives a summary of their performance in Virginia:

Near Petersburg, Va.
July 26, 1864

> As I have little leisure time, I thought I would give you a short history of our campaign in Virginia...about the 7th of June, we were ordered to escort a large train of supplies to the front. This was our first march, and a sorry one it was. It was a forced march, and many of the men had to throw away nearly all of their baggage, so as to keep up. We expected to get a rest here for a day or two, but were disappointed. We had to start almost immediately en route for Petersburg. Here, at Old Church Tavern, we joined our corps, and were assigned to the 4th Division, 2d Brigade, 9th Army Corps. Our

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brigade being the rear guard of the corps, we had a great deal of hard marching; and being in a very important position, we all felt the responsibility that was resting on us as rear guards. We proceeded along finely till we arrived at Dawson Bridge, near the Chickahominy River, where we rested one day, and a Godsend it was for us. So, the nest evening we started, but went only a short distance, and stopped till morning, crossing the Chickahominy. We expected to be attacked. The crossing was accomplished without any difficulty--our regiment being the last to cross the river. We learned since that a brigade of rebels were watching us at the time we crossed, but they did not molest us. We continued on our march until we came to Charles City Point, on the James River, which being a fortified place, we stopped over night; but next day, learning that a large force of rebels intended to attack us, we crossed the river on a pontoon bridge.

No sooner had the crossing been accomplished, than the rebels came in sight and began shelling us; but luckily for us, a gunboat was lying in the river protecting the bridge, and soon drove them away. After crossing, we rested here one day, when our brigade was sent to the front immediately, so as to assist in storming the rebel works that night. So on we went, expecting to have a battle very soon.

Although the men were very tired, they were anxious to give fight to their enemies; but on arriving at the front, the programme being changed, we ordered to rest until further orders, which was a Godsend to us. We had two days' rest, and then were ordered to the front, to take position in the rifle pits, which we consider healthier than going into the fight but, when ordered, we are ready and willing to fight.

Our regiment is not in good fighting trim at present, on account of an insufficiency of officers. In other respects they are all right. We are expecting every day; to be sent to the front; but it is ordered otherwise, probably for the best. Our regiment has built two forts and about three miles of breastworks, which shows that we are not idle, and that we are learning to make fortifications, whether we learn to fight or not.

> We are now lying in camp, about a mile and a half from the city, resting a day or two. It is quite a treat for the boys to get a rest after working day and night, four hours on and four hours off. We have worked in that way for eight or ten days, without stopping. But my opinion now is, that the laboring work is nearly over, so that we will have nothing to do but watch the rebels.
>
> There is heavy firing of artillery and small arms every night from both sides, which sounds most beautiful to us...[22]

McCaslin's letter was written just four days before the ill-fated Battle of the Petersburg Crater.

As the Petersburg siege continued on as an apparent stalemate, Grant began to give serious consideration to an idea formulated by a group of miners in the 48th Pennsylvania. They proposed digging a tunnel under Lee's breastworks and filling them with explosives, timed to go off, and an assault to be launched into the hole created by the explosion.

Grant reluctantly agreed to the plan and during July the 29th and other black regiments were drilled for the assault, though they did not know at the time about the planned explosion.

The explosion was to take place just before dawn on July 30. General Burnside had planned for the assault to be led by the 29th and other black regiments. Just before the deadline of the assault, General Meade protested to Grant about the use of the black regiments leading the assault. He believed they were too inexperienced and by placing them in the frontal assault, public opinion would condemn Grant for wasting the

lives of such inexperienced black troops.

Burnside protested Meade's argument on the grounds the black regiments had trained specifically for the assault and the white regiments were too worn out to carry the assault. Grant was persuaded by Meade and the assault plans were changed.

General James Ledlie's 1st Division was chosen to lead the assault. Ledlie was picked simply because Burnside had called his commanders together and had them draw straws to see who would lead the assault.

On the morning of July 30 the explosion went off just before 5:00 am. The mine created a crater at least forty by eighty feet, throwing four pieces of artillery and three companies of Rebels into the air.

After the explosion, the assault was to begin before the Rebels could regroup. However, Ledlie was secluded in a bombproof shelter and by some reports, was engaged with a provision of liquor. After considerable delay, he ordered the assault to begin. Regiment after regiment piled into the crater and many became separated from their officers and were unable to move forward.

At 6:00 am, Meade ordered all divisions, white and black, into the crater. General Ferrero was to direct the assault but he found Ledlie in his shelter and opted to join him with his liquor.[23]

The 29th was led by their Colonel, John A. Bross and

assaulted to the right of the crater. Bross was felled as soon as he reached the crater's rim. By this time, the Rebels had regrouped and were pouring a steady rain of lead into the confusion of the Union ranks.

Just after 1:00 pm the assault came to an end. Union casualties were heavy. The 4th Division, comprised of the black regiments, had the heaviest losses, totaling 1,327 killed, wounded, and missing. The 29th incurred 11 officers killed or wounded, 19 enlisted men killed, 47 wounded, 47 captured or missing, for a total loss of 124.[24]

As news of the bungled assault reached the public, there was a tendency to place blame for the failure of the assault on the black regiments. This stemmed from reports by some white regiments that had not the first black regiments into the crater not broken ranks, the assault could have been carried. However, some white regiments offered no support for the black regiments during the battle and both Ledlie and Ferrero were absent from the scene of the battle.

William McCaslin wrote home to Bloomington, giving his eyewitness account of the event:

Near Petersburg, Va.

> We have had a severe fight with heavy loss. Our regiment went into the fight with a determination to conquer or die. Our brigade was ordered to the front, early in the morning of the fight, to charge a rebel fort as soon as it would be blown up, but the plan was changed, for a brigade of white troops were

> ordered to make the charge, and our brigade to follow and charge the next works. So on we went, on the run through the fort and into the other works as fast as we could go, through a terrible crossfire of artillery and musketry, till we came to the further end of it. Here we rested for a few minutes, then the order was given to charge over the parapet, which was done in handsome style, the men following the officers close, this was the trying point for us. Just as we got into the ditch, and fairly at work, the rebels made a charge on us and we were ordered to come out of the ditch, which we did. Here we lost our Col., and at this time we did not have but one officer left in the regiment, and that was our Captain, all the others being killed or captured. We all staid by him till the fight was over. After we got out of the thickest of the fight, he was struck in the leg a little above the ankle which makes him lame, but he is with the regiment. Our company lost 18 men killed, wounded, missing and taken prisoners. Four are prisoners, captured while out with a flag of truce the next day; three were wounded which we saved; eleven are missing, which shows how our company stood the fire. I hope you will not be uneasy about me for I am safe and sound, and feel as though I will go through all right.
>
> Give my respects to all my friends, tell them that the colored soldiers can fight and have the honor of being brave. Maj. Brown was knocked into a ditch and was badly hurt, but is with us yet. I met a squad of prisoners who said that there was about five or six men buried up when the fort was thrown up, it blowed everything, guns and men into the air and scattered them in every direction.[25]

When this letter appeared in the Daily Pantagraph, it was described as an extract from a letter written by a non-commissioned officer of the 29th to his wife in Bloomington. There were only two non-commissioned officers in the 29th from Bloomington and one of those died as a result of the battle. The surviving non-commissioned officer was William McCaslin.

At least two men from Bloomington died in the Battle of the Crater at Petersburg. They were Corporal George S. Williams of Co. A, the runaway slave from Mississippi, and Charles J. Scott.[26] Williams may have died a prisoner of war.

At the end of the war, the 29th was ordered to Brownsville, Texas in the early part of June and there they remained until they were mustered out of service in November, 1865. The 29th did not relish their duty in Texas and wanted desperately to come home. Once again, William McCaslin took pen in hand and sent off a letter to the people of McLean county appealing for their assistance to have the 29th mustered out of service:

Ringhold Barracks, Texas
Sept. 14th, 1865

> Mr Editor:--As a Union soldier, and as a man sacrificing the comforts of home, and society of friends by yielding to the patriotic motives which led him to fight against a slaveocratic rebellion, I request a short hearing through the columns of your influential journal. Not for myself alone is this request made, but that others too may know how the colored portion of the army feel towards those whose homes and hearth stones we have tried to protect, as well as seeking the protection of American Liberty.
>
> The regiment to which I belong is an Illinois organization, a fact well known to you I make no doubt. That as an Illinois volunteer regiment, our treatment compared with other regiments of that State is exceptional and that you know. Can this be so on account of our organism being of Ill's more sable sons? So do those in power fail to carry out the wishes of the people. Colored soldiers--volunteer soldiers--men of free birth and high aspirations responded to their country's call to see the day when justice, according to merit, and not prejudice according to color, would be their reward. Oh my wounded country! suffering, lacerated from slavery's bloody knife, when will the penalty of injustice teach them how to deal justly with those, the fruits of whose hands and loins have been thy source of much of the great riches.
>
> In the name of God and the bloody fields of battle, over which we have marched in thirst and hunger,

> rain and mud, wilderness and darkness, I inquire, why have we not been restored, as volunteer troops to the bosom of our families and friends?
>
> Will not our Illinois friends inquire into the condition of one of the regiments that has never dishonored the State from whense she came, and see to it that she fares and be treated as other regiments are treated? As one of her soldiers I beg a hearing, and I know I represent the feelings of almost the entire regiment who have suffered with me, when I make these my humble requests. If we remain in this unhealthy country, disease will finish our decimation.
>
> We, however, us soldiers, feel bound to submit to our superior officers, and appeal only to their charity for relief.
>
> The publication of this article will oblige hundreds of patriotic soldiers, and very greatly oblige your friend truly,
>
> Wm. McCaslin
> Serg's Maj. 29th U.S.C.I.[27]

THE TROOPS COME HOME

On September 23, 1865 the Massachusetts 55th was discharged form service. On September 30, the Daily Pantagraph printed this short article:

> It will be remembered that three years ago about a dozen colored men enlisted from this city in the 54th (55th) Massachusetts. Several of these were killed, several died, some were discharged, and four only, we believe served out their period of enlistment. Four of them came back on Friday, having been mustered out in Massachusetts a few days ago. We suggest that our colored brethren get up a ball in honor of these heroes of Petersburg, Fort Wagner and other hard fought battles.[28]

Of interest, the newspaper lists the regiment as the 54th instead of the 55th, and also reports these men as seeing

action at Petersburg, which they did not (it was the 29th).

The black community did put together a celebration for the returned black veterans. On October 20, 1865 the Daily Pantagraph reported on the event that had been held the previous Thursday evening at lower Phoenix Hall:

> **The African reception**--It was thought best by our colored citizens to give a reception supper to the returned colored soldiers. The committee in charge of the matter Joe Holly, Wm. Herron, Eliza Esque, Elizabeth Holly, and others, desire to return thanks to those who so readily gave all the assistance required. Just thirty returned soldiers were present, some of whom had served three years. They were mainly from the 55th Massachusetts and 29th US, a few were from other regiments. A few speeches were made, and a bountiful supper was "discussed".
>
> Twenty-five of the soldiers went through with a sample drill to show their proficiency. Nearly three hundred people took supper, all but four or five of whom were colored. The whole proceedings were pleasant and orderly, conducted wholly by persons of African descent, and they never held more creditable meeting in this city. We are glad to see that the gallant services of our colored soldiers, are so highly appreciated by their friends who have been at home. In one respect, the blacks have a great advantage over the whites. They can join unanimously in entertainments of this kind, as they are all agreed upon the question of the propriety of the late war. Who ever heard of a Copperhead negro![29]

The article reports "just thirty" returned soldiers were present, implying several others had not yet returned home. This is true as the 29th had yet to be officially discharged from their assignment in Brownsville, Texas. Those from the 29th present at the reception were those who had been discharged for a variety of reasons.

The "just thirty" statement also would tend to substantiate, to some degree, that there were more than twenty blacks enlisting from McLean county. At the beginning of this paper,

the figure of 39 was offered as the number of men who had enlisted during the war and this newspaper article lends credence to that number.

When it is all said and done, no one may ever know for certain the exact number of McLean county blacks who served in the Civil War. The research for this paper suggests there were significantly more who served than had been previously known and that this should point the way for further research into this topic.

The Daily Pantagraph's article on the reception for the returning soldiers ended with the statement, "Who ever heard of a Copperhead negro!". The answer need not be spoken for it was demonstrated by the actions of McLean county's Civil War veterans of the colored regiments.

McLEAN COUNTY BLACKS WHO SERVED IN COLORED REGIMENTS IN THE CIVIL WAR

NAME	COMPANY	REGIMENT
Abbot, John	F	29th
Anderson, James	F	29th
Ayers, J. T.		101st
Bell, James		29th
Bird, Kane	E	55th Mass
Blue, Richard	A	29th
Brown, Alexander		29th
Carson, Delos		6th
Clay, Henry	A	29th
Couch, James W.	A	29th
Curtis, John H.	E	55th Mass
Edington, James		29th
Ferguson, Carter	F	55th Mass
Gillmore, Joseph S.		29th
Glasco, Samuel		55th Mass
Gooch, Young	A	55th Mass
Hopson, Archibald	D	29th
Jenks, W. J. M.		11th
Johnson, Lewis (1)	Recruit	29th
Johnson, Lewis (2)	Recruit	29th
May, Wade H.	D	29th
McCaslin, William	A	29th
McClellan, Oscar	D	29th
Merriman, Slylvester		55th Mass
Pointer, Mason	A	55th Mass
Reed, Richmond	E	55th Mass
Scott, Charles J.	B	29th
Scott, James	E	29th
Scott, Joseph		55th Mass
Smith, Daniel		14th
Smith, James	C	29th
Stewart, Richard	B	29th
Thompson, Martin	E	29th
Valentine, James	G	29th
Wheeler, Frank	Recruit	29th
White, Samuel	A	29th
Williams, George	A	29th
Williams, Henry	E	55th Mass
Williams, John	B	29th
Wormsley, William		29th

McLEAN COUNTY BLACKS WHO DIED IN THE CIVIL WAR

Abbot, John
Ayers, J. T.
Carson, Delos
Couch, James
Edington, James
Gillmore, Joseph S.
Glasco, Samuel
Jenks, W. J. M.
Scott, Charles J.
Scott, Joseph
White, Samuel
Williams, George S.
Wormsley, William

BLACK CIVIL WAR VETERANS WHO MOVED TO McLEAN COUNTY AFTER THE WAR

NAME	COMPANY	REGIMENT
Aberbathy, Peyton	C	8th H. A.
Anderson, John		27th
Beldon, Phillip	A	29th
Bluford, George	H	102nd
Duff, Simon		29th
Esque, Isaac	F	65th
Green, Hasting		
Green, Joseph		
Green, W.		
Gibson, H.		
Hill, Augusta		
Hooser, W. H.	G	16th
Huggins, Jack		
Johnson, John	A or H	29th
Juda, Washington	I	13th
Lewis, Charles W.	A	29th
Lewis, Lewis		
Lowery, Moses		
Newton, Addington		
Pointer, Andrew	K	29th
Riley, Charles	E	59th
Robinson, William	F	102nd
Samuels, Alford		
Samuels, Pias	C	5th
Shropshire, Sam		
Swain, George	F	55th Mass
Thomas, Frank	A	29th
Williams, Rueben	K	102nd

ENDNOTES

1. Howard Bell, "Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War" and Ira Cohen, "The Evolution of a Community: McLean County's Black Population, 1837-1920". Both are unpublished manuscripts on file at the McLean County Black History Project.

2. US Census 1850, 1860, and 1870. The muster rolls of the 29th USCI found in the Adjutant-General's Report for the State of Illinois, 1861-1866, vol. VIII, p.777-805. Muster rolls found in the Record Service of the Fifty-fifth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, p.114-144. The plaque entitled, "Colored Veterans of the Civil War and Spanish-American War" on the war monument, Miller Park, Bloomington, Illinois. From these sources, lists of all black males residing in McLean county who would have been between the ages of 15 and 50 during the period of the war were compiled and cross referenced with all known muster rolls of regiments with black men from the county.

3. Daily Pantagraph, August 19, 1864 and muster rolls of the 29th USCI.

4. Dudley Taylor Cornish, The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865, p. 10.

5. Ibid., p.16.

6. Ibid., p.24.

7. Ibid., p.67.

8. Ibid., p.73.

9. Ibid., p. 95.

10. Muster rolls in Record Service of the Fifty-fifth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, p.114-144, and hereafter abbreviated as 55th Mass.

11. Frederick Dyer, A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion, p.1266.

12. Adjutant-General's Report for the State Of Illinois, 1861-1865, vol. VIII, p.777-805 and hereafter abbreviated as AGR.

13. Edwin S. Redkey, A Grand Army of Black Men: Letters From African-American Soldiers in the Union Army, 1861-1865, p.107-110.

William McCaslin's letter was written to the editor of the Christian Recorder, a publication of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

14. Frederick Dyer, A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion, p. 1728.

15. Cornish, Sable Arm, p.183.

16. Daily Pantagraph, December 2, 1863.

17. 55th Mass., p.41.

18. Ibid., p. 41-44, and Luis F. Emilio, History of the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, p. 236-253.

19. Shelby Foote, The Civil War: Red River to Appomattox, p.653.

20. 55th Mass., p.127-129, and Gazetter of McLean County, p. 112.

21. Victor Hicken, Illinois in the Civil War, p. 336-338.

22. Redkey, Grand Army p.107-110.

23. Foote, Civil War, p. 531-538, and Hicken, Illinois in the Civil War, p. 338-340.

24. Hicken, Illinois in the Civil War, p. 341.

25. Daily Pantagraph, August 24, 1864.

26. AGR, vol VIII, p. 777-805. Daily Pantagraph, August 19, 1864. Gazetter of McLean County, p. 112.

27. Daily Pantagraph, November 2, 1865.

28. Ibid., September 30, 1865.

29. Ibid., October 20, 1865.

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